

FILM CLIPS NEWS FROM THE MONTANA FILM OFFICE

Future Sight: Montana newcomer Oracle Films looks to grow

Whether it's Eastern Montana under never-ending blue skies or jagged peaks of a western range cutting the horizon, Montana looks great on screen. It's that iconic beauty that draws productions here year after year.

But what does Montana offer to a company that decides to start calling the Big Sky home? Montana Film Commissioner Deny Staggs sat down with the CEO of Oracle Films, Ari Novak, who recently opened a new animation studio and satellite office in the Bozeman area to answer that very question.

Deny Staggs: Since you guys are pretty new, please tell us more about the visual effects and other work you do.

Ari Novak: Our company produces motion pictures and we do the post-production and visual effects on those movies. We have a long-standing history of servicing visual effects on many movies in post-production. Imagine some company might produce a movie in Europe or Asia and needs visual effects; they'd turn to us to make those.

Now, instead of making those on the coasts, we'll be making them right here in Bozeman. These movies range in size from smaller, independent films to major studio releases. And this is growing quite a bit in addition to our own in-house productions.

DS: Let's go back to the beginning a little bit to fill people in. What made you want to bring Oracle Films to Montana?

AN: That's a good question. I fell in love with Montana five years ago. And I thought to myself, if I lived in a dream world or a perfect world, I'd love to be able to work in Bozeman and never have to leave.

At that point I'd been producing films for the Syfy channel and those movies are relatively low-budget, so we have to film in a lot of places that are production friendly. I realized that we might be able to pull off a low-budget film here in Montana and do it really well.

We'd produced movies in Bulgaria and Belize and went there because of the economics of it, and I felt very passionately about trying to bring some of this work home. Not just to the States, but to a place like Montana.

DS: So, what did your partners think?

AN: Oh, I think they thought I was crazy. I mean some days I still think they think I'm crazy, but that aside, it was a big pitch.

When you say Montana, most people think about a few movies: "A River Runs Through It," "Horse Whisperer," and that it's a cool place to fish.

They don't think that you can actually pull off movies especially when you're strapped for budget. I mean, you need infrastructure and resources or things working in your favor to be able to pull it off. But I made the case.

DS: That's great to hear. So, how have Bozeman, Livingston, Belgrade – those communities near you now – responded to the films and the projects you're undertaking?

AN: Livingston's a great example. It's such a beautiful town and was my first choice for our last movie, "Cowboys vs. Dinosaurs."

They were more than happy to let me have imaginary dinosaurs terrorize the town for days at a time and let us drive the wrong way down the street during action scenes and do all sorts of things you know that you just wouldn't be able to do in a major metropolitan area, or even a lot of small towns.

The people were really happy to see films being made there and they were excited to be a part of it and we were excited to engage that because it gives a movie that different kind of feel and a different kind of character.

DS: What kind of opportunities does having an office here in Bozeman offer to you guys and your work?



Ari Novak, director and CEO of Oracle Films, and crew scout Blacktail Ranch near Wolf Creek for their latest Montana-shot film. (Photo by John Ansotegui, Montana Film Office)

AN: Coming to Montana is incredibly inspiring. Every morning, I feel so lucky to work here. It's a really good workforce.

People were really surprised in my company, as well as with the networks that I work with, on how many people – really talented people – we were able to find right here in Big Sky Country to work in all sorts of high-tech fields: computer animation, post-production and in the production department.

I would say two-thirds of the crew was local, so one-third was out of L.A. and New York, on our last film. Now we're just bringing up a couple people from New York or L.A. Even in key positions, they're all locals.

DS: Are there any other benefits to having a studio in Bozeman, as opposed to another one in L.A. or New York? What's the story behind choosing to move up here?

AN: I really enjoy shooting here and the benefits of beautiful locations, the talented crew and the affordability. When you're shooting low-budget movies, that just matters so much.

But then it became, "Yeah, we're shooting a movie here, but what if we could do more of the post production of our film in Montana?" And that became a big question of could we create a facility in Bozeman and actually be able to do that work here?

We wanted to put it in Bozeman because it's got the right combination of art and outdoors-type people who are a really good fit for our company. The university's here with students in tech and the arts, and they've been a great resource. And then I think Bozeman in general attracts really good people.

DS: So, you used the Big Sky Film Grant to assist the move up here. What do you think

was the most helpful about that program?

AN: The financial support and that it was a front-loaded grant that gave us working capital. That made it real. It cost us a lot of money to run our company in N.Y. or L.A., and in Montana they're supporting us running this company here – they're literally investing in us as well.

That was a key partnership and that was something that nobody could argue with. I really tip my cap to the program.

DS: Well, thank you. Are there any other programs like that out there that you've worked with?

AN: Honestly, I haven't applied for a lot of grants. Typically a film commission is a big pain in the butt for filmmakers, believe it or not. As much as they're set up to, and want to, attract work, in actuality, most of them are just this office trying to get you to pay more money for permits or raise your budget.

The Montana Film Office is an actual partner – they make these movies happen for us. So, it's a really unique situation, a really unique program.

We've had to work with film commissions to get rebates, but at the end of the day it just wasn't worth the time and effort to get the rebates back, but your office really kicks butt.

DS: I know you're in pre-production on the talking dog movie. Tell us a little bit about that, what's in the future beyond it.

AN: "(Montana/Indiana) Bones," our talking-dog movie, is a really cool family film about a family who lives on a ranch and has lived there their whole lives, but is facing foreclosure. There's a rumor that a secret treasure is hidden in the mountains, and these kids go on a treasure hunt with their dogs to try and find the treasure. They end up finding clues, with the help of their dogs, and ... ultimately save the ranch and their home.

It's a fun film, with talking dogs, horses, goats, all sorts of things. It will be released all over the country and world later next spring. We're filming that here this summer in Montana.

DS: You're always working angles. Anything in the future beyond that that you can talk about?

AN: We've done a three-picture deal with a major distributor that requires all three movies to be shot here in Montana, which is something we worked very hard for. They wanted to do three pictures with us and we wanted to guarantee that they would do all three pictures with us in Montana.

They are really thrilled with the movie that we just shot here – it showed them that they can shoot in Montana and we can give them what they want.

DS: Where can people go if they want to learn about Oracle and all your happenings?

AN: Go to www.oraclefilms.com, or find us on Facebook, or come by our office in Bozeman, and we'll give you a cup of coffee and a tour.

To read the whole interview with Ari visit www.montanafilmm.com.



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The Art of Leadership: Easy access for webinars

If you miss one of the Montana Arts Council's Leadership Institute webinars, the will be archived at www.art.mt.gov/orgs/orgs_artsorgresources.asp.

You can now access:

- How Strong Is Your Social Net?
- Accessible Websites
- Employee or Independent Contractor?
- Socialize with Us! (an archived audio discussion)

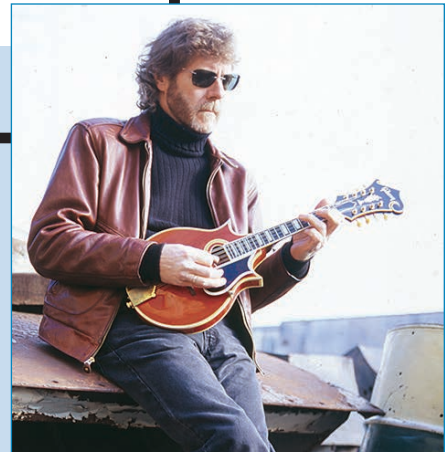
Festivals (from previous page)

fuel this weekend-long festival, which kicks off Friday evening when The Fat Tones rock The Naughty Pine Saloon "until the cows come home." Head to the river Saturday, for music by the Stacy Jones Band, CD Woodbury Band, The Fat Tones, Big Jim Adam, Sammy Eubanks, the Rae Gordon Band and Richard Allen and the Louisiana Experience. On Sunday, the line-up includes Big Jim Adam, Atomic Jive, Three Eared Dog, the Red Hot Blue Chips, and the Big Sky Blues Jam. Call 406-827-4210 or visit bigskyblues.com for details.

River City Roots Festival: Aug. 23-24 in downtown Missoula. Sam Bush, winner of the 2009 Americana Music Association Lifetime Achievement Award, headlines the ninth annual event, taking the Main

Stage at 8:30 p.m. Saturday. Nathan and the Zydeco Cha Chas rock the Main Stage Sunday with their New Orleans-seasoned Creole sound. The festival boasts loads of free music by local and national artists, a juried art show, Family Fun Festival and a four-mile run. Call 406-543-4238 or visit www.rivercityrootsfestival.com.

Bitterroot Scottish-Irish Festival: Aug. 23-24 at the Daly Mansion in Hamilton. Celebrate the history of the Scottish and Irish immigrants to the valley with a clan gathering, Highland games, pipe and drum competitions, music, vendors, and a dance contest. Call 406-274-8886 for details.



River City Roots Festival: Sam Bush